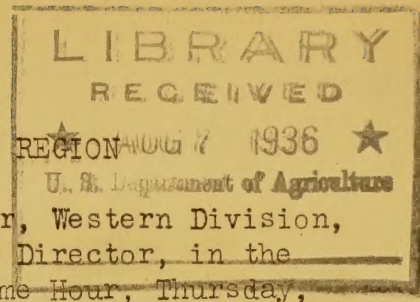


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SOIL CONSERVATION AND DROUGHT IN THE WESTERN REGION

A radio talk by C. C. Conser, Assistant Director, Western Division, AAA, delivered by Wallace L. Kadderly, Western Program Director, in the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour, Thursday, June 25, 1936.

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The present drought conditions in the Northwest call special attention to principles of the 1936 Agricultural Conservation Program. Men cannot, of course, prevent droughts by controlling the weather, but they can prevent some of the harm that droughts do. By making allowance for the dry weather, they are better prepared when it does come.

The Agricultural Conservation Program offers farmers an opportunity to withstand the ravages of drought better. This program is an aid against drought in three ways. It encourages farmers to increase their acreage of grass and legume crops, thus giving them more feed for livestock. Second, it encourages farmers to adopt practices which conserve the soil, and prevent too-rapid a run-off of whatever rain does fall during a season. Third, for the farmer who has planned his farming operations to comply with the program, the soil-conserving and soil-building payments serve as partial crop-income insurance.

This is not to say that the Agricultural Conservation Program can meet the drought situation which exists in certain States today. Drought this year is teaching the same hard lesson that other droughts have taught--farmers need to maintain adequate feed reserves, to give them a larger margin of safety in dry years that they have had in the past. The Agricultural Conservation Program can help build up such reserves for the future. It can help by its emphasis on more land in soil-conserving grasses and legumes. Many farmers have learned that lesson, but they have not been able to put it into practice. Diverting land to soil-conserving crops means loss of possible immediate cash income. The program offers farmers a chance to earn payments that will make up for some of that sacrifice.

Soil-conserving crops are all to the good, if they will grow. But in most of the Western States farmers sometimes don't get as much rain as they need. For that reason, certain soil-building practices approved under the soil conservation program aim at conserving moisture. One of these practices is terracing, which keeps the rainfall from running off the land too rapidly and lets more of it soak in. Another practice is strip cropping, which has a similar effect and which also reduces wind erosion.

Acceptance of the new program in Kansas and North Dakota shows that farmers realize how the new program can aid them in seasons of drought. Kansas and North Dakota are both great wheat growing States, with a considerable amount of mixed farming. In both of them farmers have to reckon with drought. A news bulletin the other day announced that 110,000 farmers in Kansas had signed work sheets in the new program. In North Dakota, over 114,000 work sheets were filled out. The total for the two States is 224,000. This is larger than the number of wheat contracts signed in those States under the former AAA wheat adjustment program.

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The reason for this acceptance is not hard to find. One farmer in North Dakota summed it up when he said that this program will put the farmers in a position where they can raise more and better feed for their livestock. Farmers generally agree that this program enables them to do a good many things which they have known they should do, but have not been able to do because of the immediate financial sacrifice involved.

Protection against drought, of course, is not the primary purpose of the 1936 Agricultural Conservation Program, but it is an important by-product of the program in the West. The primary purpose is to conserve the soil and to maintain and improve soil fertility. The national program recognizes the urgent need for a nationwide attack on the problem of soil losses. It recognizes that our farming as a whole has got out of balance, with too much of our land producing crops which deplete the soil and make erosion easier. To make matters worse, farmers have had no market for that excess of soil-depleting crops.

The 1936 Agricultural Conservation Program aims at putting a larger proportion of our land in crops which hold the soil, conserve the moisture, and increase soil fertility. For most of the country, this means putting more of our land into grasses and legumes. But in many parts of the West the problem can't be met that simply. It has been necessary to recognize that drought makes it difficult or even impossible to establish soil-conserving crops in some years. The difficulty has been met by providing that farmers may substitute certain soil-building practices for a soil-conserving crop. That makes it possible for farmers in dry areas to adopt practices which prevent wind erosion and at the same time comply with the requirements of the program. Of course, the ultimate objective is to get more and more of our land back into grass, but this can be done only in favorable season.

This program is far more flexible than the former AAA adjustment programs. Each farmer has wide freedom in planning his crops to fit his particular farm.

As most of you know, the program is under way. The first step was to fill out the work sheets listing the 1935 farming operations. Now the county committees, composed of farmers, are in the second stage of the program. That is the working out of productivity indexes for each farm in the county. These indexes will determine the rate of payment which each farmer will receive under this program for diverting acreage to soil-conserving crops.

After these productivity indexes are computed, each producer will have the chance to file a formal application for payment. In this application he will state what his farming operations have been for this year. This information will then be checked by actual inspection of the farm. If the producer has measured up to the standards of the program, he will be certified for payment.

In the meantime, farmers may adopt those soil-building practices which are approved for their State or county. These include, in addition to seedings of various soil-conserving crops, such practices as strip cropping and fallowing, the plowing under of green manure crops, terracing, preparing land for tree planting this Fall, and so forth. The specifications for these practices are quite detailed. Farmers should get precise information regarding them from their county agents or from their county committeemen.

Before I close, I want to say just one thing about changes which are made in the program from time to time. The program had to be put into operation early in the Spring, for farmers were ready to plant before the program was announced. Since then, minor revisions have been made. Those revisions may seem somewhat confusing, but remember that changes are made only when they will make the program operate more smoothly in a given State. Remember too, that they do not affect the fundamental purpose of the program. The fundamental purpose is to conserve and improve the soil.

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